

See a camera, hurl a rock

It seems increasingly clear that the government of Israel is making a mistake by not barring television cameras from the riot-afflicted areas of the West Bank and Gaza.

The point is not to give Israel a free hand in suppressing the Palestinian revolt, but simply to remove a factor that contributes

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directly to the violence. It's altogether possible that without the daily presence of television cameras, the protests would by now have subsided.

More than just provoking violence, the TV cameras actually

are giving the riots a continuing raison d'être.

The goal of those who are coordinating the uprising — and no three-month campaign of demonstrations, strikes and rock-and-Molotov-cocktail assaults on armed troops is entirely spontaneous — isn't to drive the Israeli military out of the occupied territories. Street violence, after all, can only accomplish so much.

The immediate goal is to render Israel a moral leper in the eyes of the international community. And TV cameras are essential to that undertaking.

Press reports are nowhere near as graphic as pictures. And written accounts describing the events taking place in the occupied territories are unlikely to inspire anything like the unrestrained moral outrage generated by television.

That's because what has been happening on the ground there isn't any more horrific than many other events that confront Western readers on a regular basis. There have been no massacres in the West Bank and Gaza — not even close.

And the notion that troops attacked by rock-throwing mobs might well fire back — leading even to daily casualties — isn't, in this day and age, likely to shock the conscience of the world.

The Palestinian leadership knows this full well. But the organizers of the riots also know that films of bruised and battered men — not to speak of live shots of Israeli soldiers beating Palestinians into submission — are likely to prove even more shocking to Western sensibilities

than a written dispatch describing a shooting. Such is the power of the medium.

That demonstrators in various parts of the world perform for television cameras is scarcely news.

That barring cameras from the West Bank and Gaza would at least slow the violence seems self-evident. But as the Palestinians realize, Israel's commitment to Western norms inhibits any such step.

Moreover, barring television cameras from shooting news film in extreme circumstances isn't a practice unique to totalitarian societies. The British, largely for morale reasons, sealed off the Falkland Islands area while hostilities were in progress six years ago.

And Washington barred both television and print reporters from covering the invasion of Grenada — mainly for security reasons.

Israel's case for doing the same, at least with respect to TV, is — if anything — more compelling. The issue for Jerusalem isn't whether the violence will or won't be recorded, but whether it — or some of it, anyway — can actually be prevented from taking place.

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